ESRC National Centre for Research Methods

Evaluating the impact of NCRM Training and Capacity Building Activities 2007-2009

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1 Introduction

The core aim of the NCRM is to improve the range and quality of research methods used by the social science community. One of the key means of achieving this is through the Centre's training and capacity building programme. The Centre (comprising Hub and Nodes) runs an annual programme of training, development and awareness raising events. Each year the Hub and Nodes propose a programme of events drawing on methodological developments arising from the Node's research programmes, the needs identified within their communities and via training needs assessments. The final programme is then agreed at an annual meeting during the summer. The programme is publicised via the NCRM website and training database as well as through other Centre networks.

A range of activities take place within the Centre's training and capacity building (TCB) program. These comprise:

- One or two day traditional tutor-led training events, such as workshops
- traditional training events with follow-on e-learning activities
- discussion and consultation fora
- online courses
- placements with Nodes
- seminar and conference type events

At least 29 NCRM TCB events currently take place each year; each Node runs a minimum of 3 events and the Hub organises 8. The reader is referred to the Centre's TCB strategy (Moley and Seale, 2009) for full details of NCRM's approach. 'Courses in Applied Social Surveys' (CASS) courses are not included but will be covered in the next exercise, for 2009-2011 courses, as CASS has recently become an associated centre of NCRM.

This report is the second impact evaluation of TCB activities, an exercise NCRM is conducting biennially, and covers the period March 2007-March 2009. The evaluation consists of a survey developed and used in the previous study. For detailed information about the methodology and its justification, therefore, please see Wiles and Bardsley (2008). The main difference with the previous study is that the qualitative research which informed the design of the survey instrument was not repeated. Also, the scope of the current study is modified, since information on placements is not included. This study examines core TCB activities of face to face training events, seminar and conference type events, and online courses. We therefore replicate phase 2 of the previous study using the 2007-2009 data.

Sections 1.1 sets out the procedure for the main survey and sections 1.2- 1.3 report on sample characteristics, comparing them to characteristics of course participants as measured by NCRM's registration data. Section 2 sets out the main survey results. Since there was only one online course in the survey period, and the questionnaire was modified for this format, the procedures and results of the online survey are reported separately, in section 3. Discussion and conclusions are set out in section 4.

1.1 Procedure

The questionnaire used is given in appendix A. The survey was administered online with email solicitation, and was a census of all NCRM event participants in the period March 2007-March 2009. A personalised form of salutation was used, incorporating the participant's title where this had been collected, and the course attended. Responses were collected over a 2-month period to September 2009 and were anonymous. Reminders were sent towards the end of the period.

1.2 Population and Sample Characteristics

There were 68 courses in total with participant numbers ranging from 2 to 64, with an average (median) of 17 participants. The population consisted of 1370 participants in total. The achieved response rate was 35%, with 479 responses received. (In the previous survey covering 2005-2007 the response rate was 30%.) 65% of TCB participants were female compared to 69% of the sample. There is therefore a very slight overrepresentation of female participants in the sample.

Table 1 shows which sector a participant at an NCRM Training and Capacity Building Event was employed in at the time they attended the event. By far the largest category is academic employment. The same information was collected for survey respondents and the distribution accords closely with the registration data.

Sector	**Count**	**%**
University / College	836	89.70
Government / Other Public Sector Organisation	47	5.04
Voluntary-Sector Organisation	16	1.72
Research Institute	16	1.72
Other	10	1.07
Private Sector	7	0.75
Missing	438	
Total	1370	

Table 1: TCB Participants' sector of Employment

Table 2 shows TCB event participants' career stage at the time of the event.

Career Stage	**Count**	**%**
Student	320	23.36
Junior Researcher	411	29.93
Senior Researcher	94	6.86
Professor/Reader/Head of Unit/Director	38	2.77
Other	87	6.35
Missing	420	30.66
Total	1370	

Table 2: TCB Participants' Career Stage

Table 3 shows this information for the survey sample.

Career Stage	**Count**	**%**
Student	200	41.75
Junior Researcher	160	33.40
Senior Researcher	72	15.03
Professor/Reader/Head of Unit/Director	24	5.01
Other	23	4.80
Total	479	

Table 3: Respondents' Career Stage

Comparing tables 2 and 3, it seems that students are over-represented in the sample. For 42% of the survey respondents are PG students (Table 3), whilst only 23% of those registered were coded as postgraduates (Table 2). Nearly 1/3 of the career stage information is missing in table 2 though. The impression of over-representation of postgraduates is reinforced if we consider the missing registration details. Inappropriately-coded participants in the registration data have been classified as missing in Table 2. This in fact included 122 participants who were coded as 'researchers' with no further indication of their career stage. A natural way to proceed is to first reallocate these 122 'researchers' in the registration data according to the observed ratio of junior to senior researchers (160:72). We then assume that the career stages of the remaining 298 participants in the 'missing' category, for whom no career stage was recorded at all, are Missing At Random to reallocate these 298 participants across career stages. The results of this two-step procedure are shown in Table 4 below. For a sample size of 479 one would expect to observe around 228 Junior Researchers (30% of 479) whereas we actually observe 160.

Career Stage	**Estimate**	**%**
Student	409	29.85
Junior Researcher	652	47.60
Senior Researcher	149	10.89
Professor/Reader/Head of Unit/Director	49	3.54
Other	111	8.12
Total	1370	

Table 4: TCB Participants' Estimated Career Stage

The primary disciplinary affiliation of participants is shown in Table 5 below. Comparing this to the same information collected in the survey, the distributions are highly consistent. The most frequent discipline is Sociology, followed by Psychology, and then Medical Sciences and Social Policy.

Discipline	**Count**	**%**
Area Studies (AS)	4	0.40
Demography (DEM)	17	1.69
Economic and Social History (ESH)	10	1.00
Economics (ECON)	38	3.78
Education (EDUC)	69	6.87
Environmental Planning (PLAN)	6	0.60
Human Geography (GEOG)	45	4.48
Linguistics (LING)	3	0.30
Management and Business Studies (MBS)	57	5.68
Political Science and International Studies (POL)	21	2.09
Psychology (PSY)	159	15.84
Social Anthropology (ANTH)	42	4.18
Social Policy (SOP)	74	7.37
Social Work (SW)	21	2.09
Socio-Legal Studies (SLS)	14	1.39
Sociology (SOC)	196	19.52

Science and Technology Studies (STS)	10	1.00
Statistics, Methods and Computing (SMC)	50	4.98
Arts and Humanities	23	2.29
Biological Sciences	17	1.69
Engineering and Physical Sciences (includes Astronomy and Particle Physics)	5	0.50
Environmental Science	8	0.80
Medical Sciences	75	7.47
Other	40	3.98
Missing	366	
Total	1370	100
Other includes		
Health professions	5	
Vetinary sciences	4	
Epidemiology	4	
Ecological Economics	4	

Table 5: Discipline of TCB Participants

1.3 Further Sample Characteristics (achieved sample)

For the sample characteristics in this section we do not have registration data to compare the sample against. Table 6 shows the age profile of respondents.

Age	Count	%
20-29	80	16.70
30-39	182	38.00
40-49	114	23.80
50-59	78	16.28
>=60	25	5.22

Table 6: Age of Respondents

The most common respondent age group is between 30 and 39 years of age. There are relatively few respondents over 60. This picture is consistent with the data collected for 2005-2007.

Table 7 shows in which region respondents were living at the time they attended an event. The overall pattern is quite similar to that observed in the data for the previous period (Wiles and Bardsley, 2008), the main difference being a higher proportion of responses from the North West – this proportion was only 9% last time. At present we cannot observe registration statistics on location, but Nodes have been asked to collect this at registration stage from 2009 onwards.

Location	n	%
London	71	14.82
South-West	33	6.89
South-East	62	12.94
East of England	23	4.80
North-West	110	22.96
North-East	53	11.06
Midlands	36	7.52
Wales	15	3.13
Scotland	39	8.14
Northern Ireland	7	1.46
Other	30	6.26

Table 7: Location of Respondents

2 Results

Results are set out in two sections below. Sections 2.1- 2.2 present the results most informative about the impact of NCRM's TCB events, breaking them down by the type of course, career stage of respondent, and the year of the course. We compare responses from quantitative and qualitative methods events, excluding mixed methods ones, and responses from early and late career participants. 'Early career' researchers are defined as students and junior researchers, 'late career' as senior researchers as professors heads of unit and so on, as set out in Table 4. Section 2.3 sets out results on the preferred timing and location of courses.

2.1 Overall results and Cross-Sectional Comparisons

Table 8 reports respondents' reasons for attending the event, as percentages who gave each reason. Overall the most common response is A, to learn methods necessary to conduct a specific research task, followed by D, to learn about developments in a particular area of research methods.

"What were your reasons for attending the event?"

A: To learn methods necessary to conduct a specific research task

B: To assess the feasibility of using a particular method for a specific research task

C: To gain methodological resources such as reading lists, other documents and links that I use or plan to use

D: To learn about developments in a particular area of research methods

Response	Overall	Quantitative	Qualitative	Early Career	Late Career
A (%)	54	60	60	58	41
B	33	42	28	31	39
C	26	20	22	28	21
D	53	39	48	51	58

Table 8: Reasons for Attending the Event

Table 9 shows respondents' perceptions of whether they had benefited. Most respondents reported that they had. This proportion (*circa* 90%) seems constant across the cross sections.

"Do you think the course has benefited you?"

%	Overall	Quantitative	Qualitative	Early Career	Late Career
Yes	91	92	89	92	88
No	9	8	11	8	13

Table 9: Perceptions of Benefit

Table 10 below reports respondents' perceptions of the ways in which they had benefited for the 91% who had reported benefiting. In general the responses are concentrated in the mid-upper part of the table, with the exception of networking and referencing / resources benefits (columns E and F).

"How much have you benefited in the following ways?"

A: Increased ability to do research
B: Increased knowledge about research methods
C: Opportunity for clarification and reflection
D: Engagement with course tutors / event leaders
E: Networking with course participants
F: As an input to teaching & supervision
G: As a source of references / resources

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Greatly	12	17	21	18	10	4	11
Significantly	26	42	43	29	20	12	35
Moderately	38	31	23	24	26	18	29
Slightly	16	9	9	15	23	16	17
Not at all	4	1	1	10	18	19	6
Not appropriate	4	1	2	4	2	31	2

Table 10: Manner of Benefit

The table is shown graphically in Figure 1 below, with each benefit category (A-G) represented by a stacked column:

"How much have you benefited in the following ways?"

A: Increased ability to do research
B: Increased knowledge about research methods
C: Opportunity for clarification and reflection
D: Engagement with course tutors / event leaders
E: Networking with course participants
F: As an input to teaching & supervision
G: As a source of references / resources

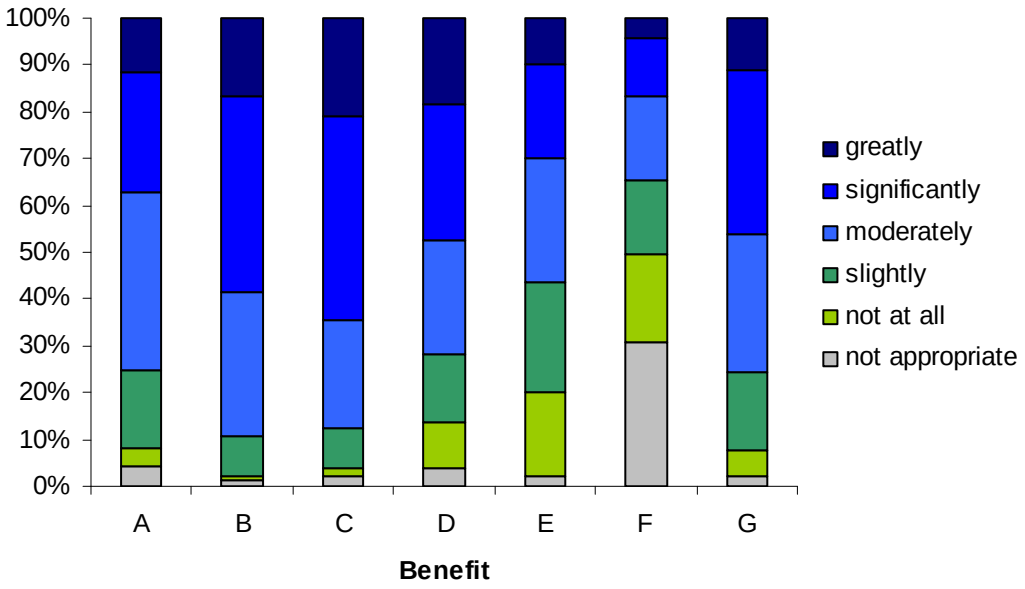

Figure 1: Manner of Benefit

Table 11 shows reasons why a respondent had *not* benefited, had he or she answered so indicated (44 respondents or 9%). The modal reason given was that there had not been the opportunity to pursue topics or issues from the course. The most common additional reason cited was a mismatch between course information and content (4 responses).

"You said that you do not think you benefited from attending this event. Why was this? Please choose from the following reasons by clicking in the boxes below (you may choose more than one reason):"

Reason	Count
It is too soon after the event	0
No post-course support	1
The content was too advanced	9
The content was too basic	10
The course was of poor quality	11
There has been no opportunity to pursue issues/topics from the course	14
Other	16

Table 11: Reasons why Respondents Thought they had Not Benefited
Note: respondents could select more than one response.

Table 12 shows whether respondents reported making use of the methods that were covered by an event. Most subjects responded positively in each cross-section.

"Have you made use of the methods that were covered after the event?"

%	Overall	Quantitative	Qualitative	Early Career	Late Career
Yes	62	63	70	64	60
No	38	38	30	36	40
Count	479	144	174	360	96

Table 12: Use of Methods Covered

Table 13 shows how respondents reported using a method. Categories A, B, and C are research uses, D and E are teaching-related uses.

"You said that you have used the methods covered by the event. How have you used them?"
A: In research intended for publication
B: In a research proposal
C: In a research project
D: In teaching
E: In supervision of students

Use (%)	Overall	Quantitative	Qualitative	Early Career	Late Career
A: research for publication	48	49	49	48	48
B: research proposal	21	14	20	18	36
C: research project	70	66	79	69	69
D: teaching	12	8	17	8	28
E: supervision	12	8	16	7	33
Other	4	6	2	4	3

Table 13: Mode of Use

Responses are concentrated in the research uses categories. It appears that there is more teaching use for relatively late career researchers, however.

Table 14 reports respondents opinions of whether it is possible to improve one's research capabilities by attending the kind of course they attended. Most subjects responded positively in each cross-section.

"Do you think you can significantly improve your ability to do research by taking courses like this one?"

%	Overall	Quantitative	Qualitative	Early Career	Late Career
Yes	84	90	82	86	80
No	6	1	10	5	8
Don't Know	10	9	8	9	11

Table 14: Impression of Potential Benefits of NCRM courses

2.2 Results on Impact by Year

It also is of interest to examine how responses vary with how long ago respondents attended a course. Table 15 breaks down responses to the key impact questions by the year in which the respondent attended the event in question. Note that all the data were all collected over the same time period in 2009, but relate to courses held at different times in 2007-2009.

%	2007	2008	2009
Q	"Do you think the course has benefitted you?"		
Yes	85	91	94
No	15	9	6
Q	"Have you made use of the methods that were covered after the event?"		
Yes	55	65	60
No	45	35	40
	"Do you think you can significantly improve your ability to do research by taking courses like this one?"		
Yes	84	83	86
No	11	5	5
Don't Know	6	12	9
Count	85	255	139

Table 15: Results by Year of Event

Across all three questions, the majority of respondents do report having benefited. It appears that perceptions of benefit tend to tail off though, with respondents from 2007 courses being less likely to report benefits than participants from 2008 or 2009 courses. Also, it appears that the longer ago the course was the less likely participants are to report using the methods covered. A similar pattern was evident in the previous survey covering 2005-2007.

2.3 Results on the Preferred Timing and Location of Courses

Table 16 shows how important respondents thought it was to have events put on in their area. The majority of respondents expressed a clear preference for regional events.

"How important is it to you to have training events put on in your region? Please select an answer from the drop-down list below."

	%
Very important	55
Important	29
Not very important	13
Not important	3

Table 16: Importance of Regional Events

Respondents were also asked about the best time of year for them to attend TCB events. Their answers are set out in Table 17 below. The distribution of preferred months appears to be rather uniform with the exception of the less-favoured month of December. The question had been modified from the previous year, removing the option to express no preference.

"When is the best time during the year for you to attend training events?"

Month	%	Month	%
Janruary	45	July	41
February	51	August	33
March	52	September	50
April	48	October	47
May	46	November	47
June	49	December	26

Table 17: Preferred Timing of Events

3 Online Quantitative Methods Course Survey

The methodology for the online training course survey is identical to that for the main survey. Some questions were nonetheless adjusted for consistency with the online format. For example, it is not appropriate to describe the training in terms of an 'event.' Two new questions were introduced to accommodate the fact that respondents for an online course will be at different stages of working through the training materials. The new questions asked i) how many hours the respondent had spent on the materials, and ii) whether they intended to use the online materials again. The changes in the questionnaire from the main survey are set out in Appendix B.

3.1 Sample Characteristics of the Online Quantitative Methods Course Survey

NCRM ran one online methods course during the period, on a quantitative methods technique (multilevel modelling), which has been running since June 2008.[1] The response rate for this course was 21%. 57 responses were received from the 257 registered course participants based in the UK during the period of data collection. Data on participant characteristics was not available at the time of compiling the survey. 49% of respondents were female. The proportion of male respondents is therefore far higher for this sample than for the main survey. Further sample characteristics for this survey are shown in the tables below. PG students are rather prominent in the sample.

Sector	Count	%
University / College	46	81
Government / Other Public Sector Organisation	6	11
Voluntary-Sector Organisation	0	0
Research Institute	2	4
Private Sector	2	4
Other	1	2

Table 18: Sector of Employment of Online Quantitative Methods Course Respondents

[1] See http://www.cmm.bristol.ac.uk/research/Lemma/ for details.

Career Stage	Count	%
Student	20	35
Junior Researcher	17	30
Senior Researcher	8	14
Professor/Reader/Head of Unit/Director	6	11
Other	6	11

Table 19: Career Stage of Online Quantitative Methods Course Respondents

Table 20 below shows the respondents' disciplinary affiliations. The most common discipline represent is statistics, methods and computing, followed by medical sciences and psychology.

Discipline	%
Area Studies (AS)	0
Demography (DEM)	7
Economic and Social History (ESH)	0
Economics (ECON)	4
Education (EDUC)	11
Environmental Planning (PLAN)	0
Human Geography (GEOG)	9
Linguistics (LING)	0
Management and Business Studies (MBS)	0
Political Science and International Studies (POL)	5
Psychology (PSY)	16
Social Anthropology (ANTH)	0
Social Policy (SOP)	0
Social Work (SW)	0
Socio-Legal Studies (SLS)	0
Sociology (SOC)	5
Science and Technology Studies (STS)	2
Statistics, Methods and Computing (SMC)	25
Arts and Humanities	0
Biological Sciences	0
Engineering and Physical Sciences (includes Astronomy and Particle Physics)	0
Environmental Science	0
Medical Sciences	18
Other	0

Table 20: Discipline of the Online Quantitative Methods Course Respondents

3.2 Results of the Online Quantitative Methods Course Survey

Reasons given for taking the online training course are set out in table 24 below. The most common reason was to learn methods necessary for a specific research task.

"What were your reasons for doing this online training?"
A: To learn methods necessary to conduct a specific research task
B: To assess the feasibility of using a particular method for a specific research task
C: To gain methodological resources such as reading lists, other documents and links that I use or plan to use
D: To learn about developments in a particular area of research methods

Response	%
A	65
B	25
C	26
D	16

Table 21: Reasons for Undertaking Training

96% of respondents reported that they thought they had benefited from taking the course. Table 24 below shows respondent's perceptions of the ways in which they had benefited from the online materials. Responses most frequently report "moderate" and "significant" benefits for the research and knowledge categories A-C, whilst benefits were described in weaker terms for teaching and referencing purposes (D and E). The results from Table 22 are shown graphically in Figure 2 below.

"How much have you benefited in the following ways?"
A: Increased ability to do research
B: Increased knowledge about research methods
C: Opportunity for clarification and reflection
D: As an input to teaching & supervision
E: As a source of references / resources

	A	B	C	D	E
Greatly	5	9	11	2	11
Significantly	24	45	40	16	31
Moderately	44	24	29	18	20
Slightly	13	9	7	5	24
Not at all	2	2	4	15	4
Not appropriate	13	11	9	44	11

Table 22: Manner of Benefit (Online Quantitative Methods Course)

"How much have you benefited in the following ways?"
A: Increased ability to do research
B: Increased knowledge about research methods
C: Opportunity for clarification and reflection
D: As an input to teaching & supervision
E: As a source of references / resources

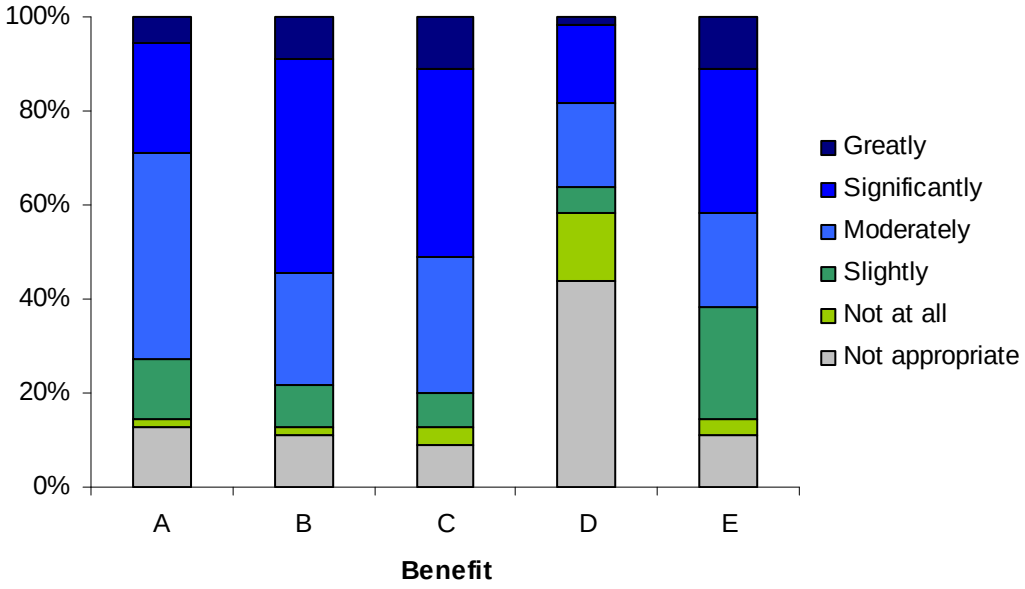

Figure 2: Manner of Benefit (Online Quantitative Methods Course)

65% of respondents reported that they had used the methods covered in the online materials. These respondents' uses of the training are reported in Table 23 below. Categories A, B, and C are research uses, D and E are teaching-related uses. Most uses reported were for research purposes.

"You said that you have used the methods covered by the event. How have you used them?"
A: In research intended for publication
B: In a research proposal
C: In a research project
D: In teaching
E: In supervision of students

Use (%)	Use	%
A: research for publication	A	41
B: research proposal	B	5
C: research project	C	68
D: teaching	D	14
E: supervision	E	19
Other	Other	11

Table 23: Mode of Use (Online Quantitative Methods Course)

95% of the respondents were of the opinion that "it is possible to significantly improve [one's] ability to do research by taking online training courses like this one."

Table 24 below shows how many hours of study the respondent had completed, in their estimation. A wide range of responses is reported, from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 150, with a median response of 8 hours.

"How many hours do you think you have you spent on the course materials so far?"

Hours	n	%
0-5	27	47
6-10	11	19
11-15	4	7
16-20	6	11
21-25	2	4
26-30	2	4
31-35	0	0
36-40	2	4
41-45	0	0
46-50	0	0
>50	3	5

Table 24: Hours of Study Completed

Respondents were also asked whether they intended to make use of the online materials again. 67% answered that they did, 5% that they did not, with 28% undecided.

4 Discussion

4.1 Population and Sample Characteristics

Section 1.2 indicated that junior researchers are probably under-represented in the survey sample with postgraduate students being over-represented. The variation in response rates between different types of courses was checked for any pattern which might 'explain this away,' but this exhibits no clear pattern. The larger than expected proportion of junior researchers revealed by the registration data may be interpreted in a positive light because of NCRM's focus on advanced and innovative training, and training across the whole spread of career stages, rather than having an emphasis on postgraduate training. A possible explanation assuming junior researchers are indeed under-represented in responses is that they are relatively short of time with which to respond to surveys whilst postgraduate students are relatively time rich.

The remaining observations concerning the population and sample reinforce observations of the previous study. Firstly, NCRM's TCB participants are in the main working or studying in academic institutions (Table 1). However, this could be argued to understate NCRM's TCB contribution to other sectors, as many postgraduate students can be expected to commence work in non-academic jobs on completion of their courses.

Secondly, from table 6 approximately 83% of NCRM's course participants in the period were from social science disciplines, according to the ESRC typology we have used (the entries in the table which are followed by capital letters). Thus a large majority of NCRM training is of social scientists. The remaining disciplines represented may also have substantial social science components.

It would be useful to compare the information in table 6 with that for the population of social scientists, but we have not been able to access suitable data. The relevant data collected by HESA

on academic employment uses a very different classification system. For example, the HESA data contains no information on psychology, but includes Law, which is not included in the ESRC classification.

4.2 Overall Results and Cross-Sectional Comparisons

The overall results are positive (tables 9-13). The overwhelming majority of respondents report benefits from attending the events, and most attendees report using the methods covered afterwards. Research accounts for most of this use but there are also teaching and supervision benefits. A large majority also report that attending such events is a viable way to significantly increase their research competence (table 14).

There is some evidence of different reasons for attending between quantitative and qualitative events (Table 8; χ^2 (4) = 8.5, p = 0.07). From the table it appears that people are more likely to be interested in assessing the feasibility of a method for a certain task at quantitative events. A general desire to learn more about developments in an area of methods seems more prevalent as a motivation to attend qualitative events. Respondents from quantitative events also appear to be slightly more disposed to state that it is possible to "significantly improve one's ability to do research by attending events like these" (Table 14; 2-tailed test of equality of two proportions, $p < 0.05$). Further comparisons on this dimension did not reveal any statistically significant differences.

There is also some evidence of different reasons for attending between 'early' and 'late career' researchers (Table 8; $\chi^2(4) = 9.2$, $p = 0.06$). Early career researchers seem relatively more likely to have been motivated by a desire to learn methods necessary to complete a specific research task. As expected, the uses to which TCB is put appear to differ between early and late career researchers (Table 13; $\chi^2(4) = 27.9$, $p < 0.01$). Late career researchers appear to be more likely to make use of the methods covered in research proposals and in teaching and supervision. This may reflect a large proportion of early career researchers employed as fixed term contract research staff with limited teaching responsibilities and less opportunities to apply for grant funding. Further differences between early and late career stage respondents' answers were not statistically significant.

4.3 Results on Impact by Year

From Table 15 perceptions of benefit appear to atrophy slightly over time. Comparing respondents from 2007 courses from those in 2009, significantly less reported that they had benefited from the 2007 courses ($p < 0.05$; 2-tailed Z test). It also appears that *less* participants make use of TCB the longer ago they attended an event, a pattern that was also observed in the 2005-2007 exercise. However, this is not statistically significant in the current results. There was some evidence in the previous study of a 'use it or lose it' effect, but this cannot explain the anomaly, since over time the true amount of use that someone has made of TCB can only be increasing over time.

4.4 Comparison with 2005-2007

More participants were registered at NCRM TCB events across the two surveys (935 and 1370 respectively), an estimated increase of 47% judging by the numbers registered with email details

(the target sample). This count understates the numbers registering for events in 2007-2009, however, since 238 people registered for events for which email and other details were not supplied. The 2005-2007 registration data do not seem to contain comparable omissions. This brings the count to 1608 and estimated increase to 72%. It should be noted that this figure does not adjust for the length of a course, however. In addition to this, 274 participants were registered on an online training course. Absolute numbers trained are unknown, since the number of persons who register but do not attend is not recorded.

The perceptions of benefit seem fairly constant – and 'high' (94% and 91% reported they have benefited across the two surveys, respectively). In both surveys the majority of respondents reported making use of the TCB (61% and 62% respectively). Consistently with the previous period, most reported uses of the TCB have been research uses rather than teaching or supervision-related.

4.5 Results on Timing and Location of Courses

The results on optimal timing confirm those from the previous study, with December appearing to be less suitable, presumably because of the Christmas break. Respondents report a strong preference for events held in their region, with only a small minority (16%) reporting that location is of little or no importance (Table 16). The results therefore support the regional emphasis of NCRM TCB activities.

4.6 Online QM Course Results

The results for the online course in multilevel modelling display some differences to the main survey results. Only one course was run in this format though, and it does not have an exact face to face equivalent, since a number of modules are offered at different levels and we do not have information about which modules were used. We are not in general, therefore, able to attribute any differences observed with any certainty to the online nature of the course. One factor which might be so attributable, however, is the lower response rate to the survey, since the response rate for face to face multilevel modelling courses as a whole was around 40%. This may be related to the diminished interpersonal element in online interaction.

One other difference to the main survey results (comparing to the generality of quantitative methods courses) was, apparently, a difference in motivation (Table 21; $\chi^2(3) = 9.4$, $p = 0.02$). From the table it seems there was a relatively high motivation to learn techniques for a specific research task.

It seems clear that there is a high variance in the time respondents have spent on the materials (Table 24). This would appear to be an essential feature of online courses since participants can register at any time. From the table nearly half of respondents reported using the materials for 5 hours or less. It seems that much of this pattern may be accounted for by learners who used the materials for a relatively short time and have not returned to them, since if low hours of use were instead attributable only to recent subscribers, the distribution would be negatively skewed, rather than positively skewed as observed. On the other hand, a high proportion of respondents do report an intention to use the materials again, and the proportion who stated that they benefited from the materials is very high (96%).

4.7 Summary

To summarise the key performance data arising from this exercise, 1608 persons registered to attend NCRM TCB events in the period March 2007-March 2009. An estimated 91% of attendees found the event beneficial (Table 9) and 92% increased their ability to do research (Table 10). Around 62% of attendees used the methods covered by the event subsequently (table 12) and an estimated 70% of this use was in research projects (table 13).

4.8 Conclusions

The biennial survey aims to evaluate the impact of NCRM's training and capacity-building events by exploring participants' perceptions of benefit and to check the process by which NCRM courses operate by collecting data relevant to its underlying model. The results for 2007-2009 are consistent with those collected in the previous period (2005-2007). The data we collected suggest that a large majority of participants perceive substantial research-related benefits from attendance. Our data are not informative on the time it takes for participants to put new skills and knowledge into practice but there does appear to be a high rate of usage of methods covered by the events. The main uses to which these are put are research uses, either project proposals or actual research. Late-career respondents seem to derive more teaching-related benefits from attendance than early-career ones. The sample composition in terms of age and career profile, employment and discipline are consistent with NCRM's understanding of its role. The importance of the regional dimension to TCB was also confirmed.

The provision of NCRM training has increased across the two periods, and now comprises online training courses in addition to face to face training. The results reported for the online courses are similar to those for the main study in terms of perceptions of benefit.

References

Moley, S. and Seale, J. 2009. A Strategic Framework for Capacity Building within the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM). Available at http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/806/1/NCRMStrategicFrameworkForCapacityBuildingMain.pdf

Wiles, R. and Bardsley, N. 2008. Evaluating the impact of NCRM Training and Capacity Building Activities. NCRM Report at http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/408/1/Report.pdf

Appendix A: Questionnaire

The National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) is collecting information about the effectiveness of its training program and related events on research methods. We would like to ask you some questions about an event organised by NCRM that you attended and about your subsequent experience. Please answer the questions below and on the following pages. Press **Next** when you have finished each page (you cannot return to a page once you have completed it). The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions concerning the completion of the survey, please email Jonathan Earley [je1@soton.ac.uk]

Our records show that you attended the following event, organised by NCRM:

(button) [course, date location]

Please click 'next' to proceed to some questions about this.

1. In which type of organisation were you working (or studying) when you attended the event? Please select the option below which most accurately describes your organisation at that time, by clicking a button.

University / college, Research Institute, Government, Private Sector, Voluntary Sector, Other

2. What was your job when you attended the event? Please select the option below which most accurately describes your job at that time, by clicking a button.

Post-Graduate Student / Junior Researcher / Senior Researcher / Professor, reader or head of dept.

If these options do not describe your job, please tell us your job title at this time, in the box below.

3. What were your reasons for attending the event? Please choose from the following reasons by clicking in the boxes below (you may choose more than one reason):

To learn methods necessary to conduct a specific research task
To assess the feasibility of using a particular method for a specific research task
To gain methodological resources such as reading lists, other documents and links that I use or plan to use
To learn about developments in a particular area of research methods

If the above options are not sufficient, please tell us any additional reason you had for attending, in the box below.

4. Do you think the course has benefited you subsequently? Please click a button below.
Yes / No

[If 4 = yes,]
4a You said that you have benefited from attending the event. How much have you benefited how much have you benefited, in the following ways? Please select a response from the drop-down list for each potential benefit listed.

Increased ability to do research
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate
Increased knowledge about research methods
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate
An opportunity for clarification and reflection
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate
Engagement with course tutors / event leaders
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate
Networking with course participants
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate
As an input to teaching and supervision responsibilities
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate
As a source of references and other resources
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate

If the above options are not sufficient, please tell us how you benefited, in the box below.

[If 4 = no]
4b You said that you do not think you benefited from attending this event. Why was this? Please choose from the following reasons by clicking in the boxes below (you may choose more than one reason):

no post-course support;
the content was too advanced;
the content was too basic;
the course was of poor quality;
it is too soon after the event;
there has been no opportunity to pursue issues/topics from the course;

If the above options are not sufficient, please tell us why you did not benefit, in the box below.

5. Have you used the methods that were covered, after the event? Please click a button below.
Yes / No

[if 5 = yes]
5a. You said that you have used the methods that were covered. How have you used them? Please choose from the following ways by clicking in the boxes below (you may choose more than one way):

In research intended for publication
In a research proposal
In a research project
In teaching
In supervision of students

If these options are not sufficient, please tell us how you have used them in the box below.

6. Do you think you can significantly improve your ability to do research by taking courses like this one? Please click a button below.

Yes / No / Don't Know

7. Where were you living when you attended this event? (that is, your usual address, not where you stayed in order to attend the event). Please select one location from the drop-down list below.
London
South-East
South-West
East of England
Midlands
North-West
North-East
Wales
Scotland
Northern Ireland

8. How important is it to you to have training events put on in your region? Please select an answer from the drop-down list below.
Very important / important / Not very important / Not at all important

9. When were you born? Please enter the year in YY format in the box below.

10. Are you male or female? Please click a button below.

11. When did you complete your first degree? Please enter the year in YY format in the box below.

12. When did you complete your postgraduate studies? Please enter the year in YY format in the box below or enter n/a if this is not appropriate.

13. According to the ESRC classification of disciplines, with which discipline do you feel the greatest affiliation?
(from drop-down menu: area studies, demography, economic and social history, economics, education, environmental planning, human geography, linguistics, management and business studies, political science and international studies, psychology, social anthropology, social policy, social work, socio-legal studies, sociology, science and technology studies, statistics, methods and computing)

14. When is the best time during the year for you to attend training events? Please select from the list below (You may select more than one time by holding down Ctrl).

Appendix B

Changes made for the Online Course survey:

Modified questions:

3 What were your reasons for doing this online training?

4a You said that you have benefited from attending the event. How much have you benefited how much have you benefited, in the following ways? Please select a response from the drop-down list for each potential benefit listed.

Increased ability to do research
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate
Increased knowledge about research methods
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate
An opportunity for clarification and reflection
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate
As an input to teaching and supervision responsibilities
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate
As a source of references and other resources
Greatly / Significantly / Moderately / Slightly / Not at all / Not appropriate

If the above options are not sufficient, please tell us how you benefited, in the box below.

6 Do you think you can significantly improve your ability to do research by taking online training courses like this one?

Additional questions

Do you intend to use the online materials again?

How many hours do you think you have you spent on the course materials so far?